THE MINISTER OF CIVIL AVIATION (SHRI SHARAD YADAV): (a) and (b) Requests have been received from the Governments of UAE, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Sri Lanka, Republic of Yemen and Austria for grant of Cochin as a point of call for their designated airlines.

(c) So far, Cochin has not been granted as a point of call to any foreign airline. International services are, however, operated out of Cochin Airport by Air India and Indian Airlines.

Setting up of New Domestic and International Airports

1229. SHRI ANANTA SETHI: Will the Minister of CIVIL AVIATION be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have any proposal to set up some new domestic and international Airports;

(b) if so, the number of new Airports proposed to be set up during Ninth Plan; and

(c) the places identified for the location of these new Airports?

THE MINISTER OF CIVIL AVIATION (SHRI SHARAD YADAV): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) and (c) Two new airports are under construction at Tura in Meghalaya and Kargil in Jammu & Kashmir. The Government has approved in principle setting up of a new airport of international standards in joint venture at Bangalore.

Detention of Hijacked IA Plane At Amritsar Airport

1230. SHRI EDUARDO FALEIRO: Will the Minister of CIVIL AVIATION be pleased to state:

(a) Whether the release of three terrorists in exchange of passengers of a hijacked Indian Airlines plane has sent a wrong signal to the terrorists and set a bad precedent;

(b) whether the aircraft could have been detained at Amritsar by more effective strategy and operation of the Crisis Management Group; and

(c) what steps Government contemplated to avoid such incidents in future?

THE MINISTER OF CIVIL AVIATION (SHRI SHARAD YADAV): (a) In handling the situation arising from the hijacking, Government set itself three clear priorities; (i) early termination of the hijacking; (ii) the safe return of the passengers, crew & aircraft and (iii) safeguarding national security. The manner in which the termination of the hijacking was secured met the priorities Government had set out.

(b) When the aircraft landed at Amritsar, concrete and specific information in respect of the numbers, nationality, weaponry, professionalism and commitment of the hijackers was scanty and speculative. On the other hand, messages being received from the hijacked aircraft were tense and demanding. Precipitate action, in the absence of even basic information was judged as being fraught with unacceptable levels of risk.

(c) The following measures have been taken further to avoid such incidents in future:-

(i) Deployment of Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) personnel in place of State Police for security duties at the operational airports in a phased manner. The CISF has already taken over the security duties at Patna, Jaipur, Guwahati, Vadodara and Port Blair airports.

(ii) Frisking of passengers and hand baggage at the time of entry into sterile area has been tightened. Ladder point secondary frisking has been introduced.

(iii) Strict control on access to the airports is being ensured by comprehensive review of photo-identity cards to restrict the number of pass holders and banning of entry of the visitors up to 31.3.2000.

(iv) Deployment of sky marshals on some identified routes of Indian Airlines and Air India as an added safety precaution.

(v) Raising of the perimeter wall to the prescribed height at all the operational airports.

(vi) Replacement of old X-Ray machines and installation of new colour X-Ray machines wherever necessary so as to ensure that at least 2 X-Ray machines are available at every point.

(vii) Modernisation and upgradation of security related technological set up of the airports is being done in a phased manner.